



## Educational Oversight for embedded colleges: report of the monitoring visit of Navitas Holdings UK Ltd, April 2018

### Hertfordshire International College

#### **1 Outcome of the monitoring visit**

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the monitoring team concludes that Hertfordshire International College (HIC) is making commendable progress with implementing the action plan following the April 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Embedded Colleges\)](#).

#### **2 Changes since the last QAA review**

2 HIC underwent a Higher Education Review in April 2016. Since then there have been no changes in premises, ownership, Principal or the levels of courses offered. During 2016-17 the Recognition and Articulation Agreement with the University was renewed and the majority of the College's programmes were reapproved. There have been no major changes in operating procedures or the responsibilities and reporting lines of College committees and key role holders. In accordance with University policy, external examiners are now appointed by and submit their reports to the University. The University has also agreed that the College can now recruit students from the EU. The College operates a trimester system, with three intakes of students per year. Student numbers in January 2018 were 13 per cent higher than at the same time in the previous year. At the time of the review there were 246 students.

#### **3 Findings from the monitoring visit**

3 The 2016 review made no recommendations but identified four features of good practice relating to enabling student development and achievement and student engagement. Since then HIC has addressed and built on the features of good practice identified, particularly in relation to the provision of academic and pastoral support, managing transition to the University and strengthening internationalisation. Oversight of enhancement activities by the College Enhancement Team, on which students are represented, has been strengthened. HIC continues to engage effectively with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and other external reference points. Actions are described in the action plan which together with the 2016 review report are available on the College's public website.

4 The review team considered a range of evidence including HIC policies and procedures, committee minutes, student surveys, information for staff and students, annual monitoring reports and action plans. The team also reviewed information on the HIC website and virtual learning environment (VLE). Meetings were held with management, teaching and support staff from HIC and staff from the University. The review team also met current students and alumni who had progressed to courses at the University.

5 HIC staff continue to support the personal and academic development of students. Students spoke positively about the strong sense of community within HIC, the friendliness of office and support staff and the fact that 'teaching staff make students their top priority'. HIC has a clear strategy for providing academic support, based around programme and study support information on the VLE, weekly drop-in sessions and more formal academic review meetings held after the mid-term examinations. Students who have not performed well are actively directed towards the drop-in sessions or to module teachers to get additional support. The effectiveness of support processes is monitored via module evaluation, the student satisfaction survey, the Student Forum and student performance data. HIC teaching staff have access to academic skills training in the University and are able to share ideas in the HIC Teacher's Forum. They are also able to access online teaching and learning resources provided by Navitas. Three of the HIC's teaching staff are fellows of the Higher Education Academy and HIC is encouraging more to apply via the University.

6 Cooperation between staff in the two institutions continues to support the seamless transition of students from HIC to the University. HIC students are able to attend University open days to view facilities and meet admissions tutors and teaching staff. Programme leaders and teaching staff from the University also visit HIC to explain academic programmes. Close cooperation between HIC's teaching staff and University schools ensures that academic programmes maintain alignment with the University's programmes. The majority of HIC's teaching staff contribute to teaching programmes in the University, giving them additional insight into University expectations. HIC alumni met by the review team commented positively on how their experience and knowledge gained in HIC had provided a good foundation for their University programmes. HIC is working with the Collaborative Partnership Leaders from each school to organise annual transition events for students on all its foundation and pre-master's pathways.

7 HIC continues to develop the range of activities that strengthen internationalisation and promote integration between students from different backgrounds. It provides trips to places of historical interest and students can join the wide range of clubs and societies in the University. In group tasks teachers encourage students to mix with others from different backgrounds. More recently, HIC has refurbished the student lounge so that it provides a comfortable social learning space and responded positively to a request from students to provide additional sporting activities for women. A student initiative has also resulted in the establishment of a new society aimed at encouraging mutual understanding of the wide range of backgrounds and traditions of HIC's student community. HIC is encouraging its students to participate in the International Orientation Programme and other international events at the University.

8 The environment within the College continues to foster self-help and mutual support among students. Individual students are encouraged to make use of the wide range of academic and support information on the VLE or to attend drop-in sessions. Student representatives on the Student Forum, the Learning and Teaching Board and the College Enhancement Team can raise issues arising from their contemporaries and provide a student perspective on developments proposed by the College. Some student representatives also act as guides during orientation and enrolment periods. The student representatives the review team met noted that they received training for their role, that their views were respected, and that HIC responded quickly and positively to issues they raised. Collectively, these activities encourage students to actively engage with and contribute to the enhancement of their programmes. College teaching and support staff keep abreast of developments in student support via the Navitas website and Teachers Forum. The College is planning to add a session

on 'Developments in Student Support' to the agenda of the College Enhancement Team at least once every semester.

9 Admissions processes are documented in HIC's Admissions Policy and Operational Manual, and are overseen by the Director of the Admissions and Recruitment Centre, Navitas. Importance is attached to ensuring that admissions processes are fair, equitable and transparent and that applicants have a genuine intention to study. Close liaison is maintained with the Navitas Admission and Recruitment Centre and the University to ensure that admissions requirements are current and that processes are kept up to date with UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) requirements and the expectations of the Quality Code, *Chapter B2*. Any applications that do not meet the standard entry criteria are referred to the College Academic and Admission Committee and the University as appropriate.

10 The HIC website provides comprehensive information for applicants relating to academic programmes, attendance and progression requirements. It also specifies academic and English language requirements, fees and living costs and includes a link enabling an applicant to appeal a decision. An online student experience guide provides potential and incoming students with a wide range of relevant pre-arrival information. Students met by the team reported that information on the HIC website is accessible and accurate.

11 HIC takes steps to ensure that students have appropriate English language skills on entry and that these are developed during their progression through academic programmes. International students must meet English language entry requirements, assessed through the use of Home Office approved Secure English Language Tests (SELTs) and/or through approved English qualifications as specified by the University. All programmes include an Interactive Learning Skills and Communication module that students are required to pass. The module is benchmarked against the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and overseen by Navitas UK. Weekly drop-in English language classes are also provided.

12 Monitoring processes enable HIC to maintain effective oversight of its academic programmes and student performance. Annual monitoring reports are completed using the University's template and incorporate data on enrolment and progression, feedback from students, numbers of complaints and appeals, a report from the University Collaborative Partnership Leader and, where appropriate, the external examiner's report. Any issues arising from these, together with modules or pathways with low pass or progression rates, are specified in an action plan and followed up in the following year. Annual monitoring reports are overseen by HIC's Academic and Operational Advisory Committee, which also reviews detailed data on student enrolments and retention, pass rates for individual modules and progression and completion rates for pathways. The average module pass rate during the final trimester of the academic year 2016-17 was 86 per cent and 83 per cent of HIC students successfully completed their pathway and progressed on to the University. Tracer studies, enabling comparison of the degree classifications of students who have progressed from HIC with those who have entered via other routes, are completed annually by the University.

13 HIC engages effectively with its student community via module evaluation, the student satisfaction survey and the Student Forum. Students are also represented on the HIC Learning and Teaching Board and the College Enhancement Team. Issues arising from the student satisfaction survey, the Student Forum and the College Enhancement Team were previously noted in separate action plans. However, in view of the common themes emerging and in order

to allow coordinated oversight of action planning, HIC now produces a consolidated action plan, which is overseen by the College Enhancement Team.

#### **4 The embedded colleges' use of external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education**

14 HIC and Navitas continue to draw on a range of relevant external reference points in order to meet the expectations of UK higher education. HIC used the UK Quality Code as the main external reference point when formulating its action plan in response to the 2016 review. UKVI policy is an integral part of operations and the College responds immediately to any changes. All Navitas and HIC staff involved in admissions must adhere to the code of ethics laid down by the UK Council for International Student Affairs. The Interactive Learning Skills and Communication module is benchmarked against the Common European Framework. The Navitas Director of Learning, Teaching and Academic Quality is an active member of the Accreditation and Services Board of English UK and a regular contributor to conferences organised by the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes. The NIC's Director of Academic and Student Services and two other teaching staff hold fellowships of the Higher Education Academy.

#### **5 Background to the monitoring visit**

15 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's and its embedded colleges' continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider and its embedded colleges of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

16 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Philip Markey, QAA Officer and Dr David Wright, QAA Reviewer, on 30 April 2018.

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